Neanderthals of the North: re-investigating the marrow-split bones from Hollerup and their implications for the pre-Weichselian occupation of southern Scandinavia

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Did Neanderthals venture into Denmark?

The marrow-split bones from Hollerup, eastern Jutland

In 1954 zoologist Ulrik Mahl Hansen (1955) investigated some fallow deer (Dama dama) specimens that had been unearthed during excavations in the early 19th century. The deer bones came from Eemian (MIS 5e) lake sediments at the site of Hollerup, located in eastern Jutland, Denmark (56.40°N, 09.78°W) (fig. 2B). He concluded, based mostly in the breakage symmetry (fig. 1, left), that the bones showed the signs of anthropogenic modification associated with marrow extraction, and thus, taking the date into consideration, argued that Neanderthals had been present at these high latitudes during the Eemian interglacial.

Despite some obvious shortcomings with Mahl Hansen’s study, the conclusion has remained unchallenged.

On the basis of the methodological improvements since, it seems only natural, and long overdue, to re-investigate the bones in order to assess their affiliation.

Results

Here, and in Egeland et al. (2013, see QR-code), we present the results of the re-analysis of the Hollerup bones.

We observed:

1) No unambiguous tool/cut marks (fig. 1, middle).
2) No unambiguous percussion marks or notches.
3) Some carnivore teeth marks.
4) Mostly non-nutritive/post-depositional breakage. Although a few nutritive phase breakage were observed (fig. 1, right).

On the basis of this, we conclude that none of the bones, possess morphological or contextual features that can be confidently associated with human butchery practice.

References:


